

Absolutism

1. Like King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella before him, King Phillip II of Spain centralized royal power, making all parts of the government responsible to him. He had complete authority over the government and the lives of the people during his reign from 1556 to 1598. He believed that his authority to rule came directly from God. As a result he saw himself as the guardian of the Catholic Church and made it his personal responsibility to defend the Catholic Reformation (the response to the Protestant Reformation.). He used his control of the Spanish army and navy to impose the Inquisition against Protestants and heretics. Without representation, the small middle class (i.e., merchants) was heavily taxed by Phillip to fund his wars and build the Armada.

2. “L’etat, c’est moi,” “I am the state,” said King Louis XIV of France. Louis believed that he was the only one responsible for governing France when he ruled from 1643 to 1715. A tutor to his son once said, “As God’s representative on Earth, the king was entitled to unquestioning obedience. Louis reigned from the most magnificent building in Europe, the palace of Versailles. Full of the finest paintings, statues, chandeliers and mirrors, and surrounded by millions of flowers and plants, Versailles was the perfect symbol of Louis’ wealth and power. He pictured himself as the Sun King, the center of the universe. During his 72 year reign the Estates General, the legislative body of France, never met once. Without opposition, he revoked the Edict of Nantes (that had given rights to French Protestants called

Huguenots) and taxed his people to wage costly wars against the Dutch and English.

3. After a journey to Western Europe, Peter the Great decided to modernize Russia. To impose his will he became the most repressive of Europe’s monarchs, believing that his right to rule as Tsar came from God. He centralized his power and brought all Russians under his control, including the Russian Orthodox Church. Peter forced the most powerful nobles, known as boyars, to serve in either the military or state government. Peasants and serfs were required to become soldiers or work on roads, canals, and other government projects. He improved the technology, education and the military of Russia, but in the process tortured and executed thousands of people who challenged his power from 1682 to 1725.

4. According to the 1665 Kongeloven (King’s Law), The monarch of Norway “shall from this day forward be revered and considered the most perfect and supreme person on the Earth by all his subjects, standing above all human laws and having no judge above his person, neither in spiritual nor temporal [secular] matters, except God alone.” After abolishing the legislative branch known as the Rigsraadet, the king was the only person in charge of the country’s affairs. Frederick III ignored the advice of his nobles, and controlled the government and military on his own.

Example	Who rules the country?	What power do they have?	Where does their power come from?	Are there any checks on power? Whose voice is silenced?
1				
2				
3				
4				
Pattern				

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Example	Who rules the country?	What power do they have?	Where does their power come from?	Are there any checks on power? Whose voice is silenced?
1	King Phillip II	Complete authority over the government and people.	Guardian of the Catholic Church	Middle class was heavily taxed and Protestants repressed.
2	King Louis XIV	King was entitled to unquestioned obedience	God’s representative on earth	Legislative body, the Estates General, never meets. Protestants are also repressed.
3	Tzar Peter the Great	All of Russia came under his control.	Right to rule came from God	Nobles and serfs were forced into military or government service. Suppressed any challenge to his power
4	King Frederick III	Perfect and supreme authority on Earth by his subjects	Power from God	Legislative branch, Rigsraadet, abolished.
Pattern	Monarchy: one head of state	Absolutism: power over government, military, church and people.	Divine Right: their power comes from God	Nobles are losing power as legislative bodies are silenced. Power is centralized in the monarchy